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While the main activity of veterinarians is the care and treatment of animals, they are professionally trained personnel who have a history of involvement in community action. Their full potential has not been tapped to help alleviate the inadequacies of rural health services. Cited in this paper are specifics relating the number of trained veterinarians as of January 1, 1969; the educational background of the veterinarian; past community involvement; and the military's use of veterinarians. While past involvement has been broad, there are many other areas of community service that could utilize their abilities. In most cases, veterinarians would be willing to offer their personal and professional help. (DB)

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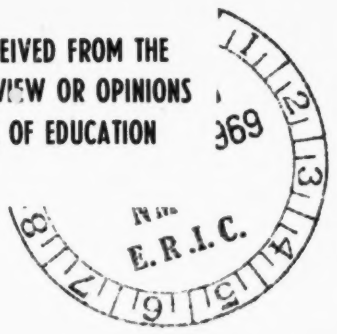

"VETERINARY MANPOWER FOR RURAL AREAS"*

E. W. Tucker, D.V.M.

Veterinary medicine is that part of medical science which deals with the prevention, cure, or alleviation of disease or injury of animals. Veterinary medicine also includes the myriads of factors concerning the care, husbandry, nutrition, housing, and sanitation of animals and their environment, as well as practical and scientific knowledge of disease transmission. Physical examinations, tests, and vaccinations are methods used to prevent or contain disease outbreaks. In this manner, veterinarians help protect the human population from diseases which may affect them such as: tuberculosis, brucellosis (undulant fever), rabies, encephalomyelitis, leptospirosis, and more than 100 others. In addition to disease control, most practicing veterinarians are surgeons and must be competent in correcting many of the conditions which befall the domestic animal. Injuries with lacerations and fractures, Caesarians, tumors, etc., are repaired on the farm without benefit of an air-conditioned surgical suite and a team of assistants. On the other hand, surgery in an animal hospital is usually done in the same manner as it is done on humans, using the same techniques, drugs, and equipment.

During World War II more than 2200 veterinarians were in the Armed Forces where their main activities were to assure a safe food supply and

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proper sanitation. Eight hundred are in the military service today working on food inspection, disease research, space medicine, and food preparation, as well as other problems.

On January 1, 1969, there were 26,472 veterinarians listed in the U.S. Of these, more than 16,000 are in private practice, many in small towns located in rural areas. Veterinarians engaged in regulatory work -- supervision of disease control programs, traffic in livestock, etc., -- and veterinary public health number more than 2200. These men already, one way or another, are on the health resources team.

Today's veterinarian is a person who has had at least 2, and usually 3 or 4, years of basic college work in required courses prior to his 4 year curriculum in the veterinary college. He is highly trained in various medical skills, and is in great demand for medical research work. There is an acute shortage of veterinary graduates because of limited teaching facilities. Most new graduates of the 18 veterinary colleges usually do not establish practices in rural communities; the number of practitioners in rural areas is slowly declining. It is expected that this trend will continue, because of farm, livestock, and economic conditions.

This background information is provided to emphasize that available veterinarians are people who should be invited to participate on the rural health team. Through training, experience, location, and knowledge of the area and its residents, his advice could be most helpful. With his stock of medicine, his practice equipment (which may even include an airplane) and his extensive emergency experience, his cooperation could be essential in a disaster. Two points bear on this: 1) in Ohio more veterinarians are on local boards of health than members of any other

profession or occupation; and 2) in Illinois 67 veterinarians are trained in the set-up and operation of Packaged Disaster Hospitals. The goal in Illinois is to have 3 veterinarians trained for service at each of the 66 units. In many hundreds of instances, veterinaarians are active in community affairs, such as elected offices, school committees, Boy Scouts, and Community Fund.

It is not to be infered that veterinarians are anxious to play the part of physicians. On the contrary, they are busy men with prime allegiance to the care of animal problems. Most of them have great interest in the community and should have a definite place in comprehensive health planning. Dr. James Steele, Assistant Surgeon General for Veterinary Affairs, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, states that veterinarians "input can cover many problems or subjects ranging from animal health, nutrition and food protection, environmental contamination, the social value of animals in mental health, the humane use of animals in research, chemicals and drugs in animal medicine, animals in recreation, and zoonoses control. Every community will have different views and problems."

Not to be overlooked on the "manpower" question are the ladies -- namely, veterinarians' wives. These women are accustomed to medical problems -- many are nurses or laboratory technicians or are educated in ancillary fields. They are active people usually willing to give their knowledge and time for community affairs.

So it would seem that local health oriented groups should break the ice. Certainly, veterinarians should not take the leadership in human health problems. But, veterinarians should be valuable assets when asked to work on projects. It would seem that here lies a large, untapped pool of health resource people who could be used. Many veterinarians find it

stimulating to join members of other professions in a worthwhile community project. Then, too, they are personally gratified when they discover how much they can contribute to the effort. Don't hesitate to ask the veterinarian to join your team. Try to utilize existing men -- do not anticipate new practitioners in rural areas. Naturally, some individual veterinarians will not cooperate. In this case, notify the local or state veterinary association about your community health project, its needs and goals, and request support from them. From these larger groups, talent you seek will be available.

In summary, veterinary manpower can be helpful in rural health problems by:

1. Assisting in comprehensive health planning.
2. Stimulating interest and cooperation among rural people.
3. Providing knowledge of residents and terrain.
4. Having equipment which might be used in an emergency or disaster.
5. Helping on environmental contamination or pollution problems.
6. Counsel on all matters pertaining to animals and diseases transmitted from animals to man.
7. Food inspection, care, and use of animal products for food.

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